

Ask Seek Knock

Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Mt 7:7

Like many of the statements Jesus made in this sermon, this one also requires careful thought and consideration. Many begin here and take the passage out of its context, thinking Jesus promised that whatever we want, all we have to do is ask and we have God's unconditional promise we will receive it. But if we read the sermon from the beginning we realize this verse must be understood within the many limitations Jesus had already set forth. Take a moment to rethink the flow of the sermon:

▶▶ Blessed Poor in Spirit, Mourn, Gentle
▶▶ Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness
▶▶ Merciful, Pure in Heart, Peacemakers
▶▶ Blessed Persecuted for Righteousness
▶▶ Let light shine and salt savor <u>5:13-14</u>
▶▶ Control anger and lust <u>5:21-30</u>
▶▶ Divorce only for adultery <u>5:31-32</u>

▶▶ Never make frivolous oaths <u>5:33-38</u>
▶▶ Turn other cheek/go second mile <u>5:38-42</u>
▶▶ Love enemies(<u>5:43-48</u>).
▶▶ Not practice righteousness to be seen of men <u>6:1-18</u>
▶▶ Change priorities from material to spiritual <u>6:19-24</u>
▶▶ Seek first His kingdom and righteousness <u>6:25-34</u>
▶▶ Never judge, without God's word as guide. <u>7:1-5</u>

If all that we ask for, seek and knock upon are within the confines of seeking after the things Jesus has revealed then this conclusion naturally follows. Those who use this verse to seek for things that lead away from the above do not fulfill the conditions of the promise. As He said later we must first "abide" in Him and have His words abide in us. Then when we ask, we are asking for the right things in the right way and it will be done.

If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. Jn. 15:7

When those who ask, seek and knock truly desire "Your will be done, as in heaven, so on earth." (Mt 6:10), Jesus' promise will be kept. At the very least this precondition would also apply to all we ask, seek and knock for. Only then can we will always receive. This is exactly how John understood Jesus:

Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. 15 And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him. 1Jn. 5:14-15

Only "if we ask anything according to His will" do we know "He hears us." Since it is not even within our ability to direct our own steps(Jer. 10:23), how should God respond when we ask, seek, and knock for things that would lead us astray? There are ways that seem right yet lead to death(Pr. 14:12). If the things we seek would destroy us, or if we ask amiss, we violate the principles of the promise and make it of no effect.

As obedient children, we would never want to ask for anything that might lead to our harm or to the disruption of His eternal purpose. This is why Jesus taught us to say "your will be done, as in heaven, so on earth." (Mt 6:10) Later when Jesus asked God to remove the cup, He was very specific: "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass away from me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will" (Mt. 26:39). Jesus knew that if God had granted this request, all the prophecies, all the promises and the eternal purpose itself would have been destroyed. So what He sought He wanted God to overrule.

But how do we know when we are asking "according to His will?" The obvious answer is when we are asking for things He promised. If we pray "give us this day our daily bread," we know it is according to His will because that is exactly what Jesus commanded. If we confess our sin, seeking forgiveness, we know it is according to His will(1Jn. 1:9). There are many things Scripture revealed that God wanted to give us if we seek them. The fruits of the Spirit(Gal. 5:22-23), the things we to our faith(2Pet. 1:3-11), and the things revealed here in the Sermon on the Mount. All of these things are within His will to give. When we know it is His will, we know that "He hears us whatever we ask," and "we know that we have the petitions which we have asked of Him."

When asking, seeking and knocking for those things God has revealed he wants us to have, Jesus promised God would help us. We should seek such things with boldness and confidence. But when we seek for things we want, but do not know what God wants, we should be humble and trust God's wisdom and love. When we ask according to His will, we know it is in our best interests. When we ask for things that are only our will, no matter how strongly we are asking and seeking it, Our fervent desire should be just as strong that God would overrule it if it is not in our best interests.

Ask

Ask, seek and knock are different methods for gaining from God the things we need. The term “ask” is a general word for making requests. It implies that we are aware of a need and have come to God to ask for it. Generally this is done in prayer. While opening our heart to God, we ask Him for the things we need. Jesus was insistent that we look to God first for all our needs. He wanted to create within us a desire to pray. One of His parables was spoken “*to the end that they ought always to pray and not to faint*”, Jesus was deeply concerned about His disciples trust and confidence. He wanted us to see God as the first and most important source for our comfort in trials and for solutions in tribulations. Whenever His people are in trouble Jesus wanted us to ask, knowing God could and would help us.

*Then He spoke a parable to them, **that men always ought to pray and not lose heart**, 2 saying: "There was in a certain city a judge who did not fear God nor regard man. 3 Now there was a widow in that city; and she came to him, saying, 'Get justice for me from my adversary.' 4 And he would not for a while; but afterward he said within himself, 'Though I do not fear God nor regard man, 5 yet because this widow troubles me I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.'" 6 Then the Lord said, "**Hear what the unjust judge said**. 7 And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? 8 I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. **Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?**" Luke 18:1-8*

We have to ask! If we do not ask or we do not ask in faith, then we will lose things we could have received. James began his book telling us to ask and then plainly stated what happens if we do not.

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. 6 But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. 7 For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; 8 he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. James 1:5-8

You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures. James 4:2-4

Thus Jesus' promise is shown to be conditional. We have to ask, but we are not to ask amiss. When our requests center upon the gratification of material pleasures, we are asking in an evil, sickly, miserable, diseased manner. “*But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition.*” 1Tim. 6:9 If we ask God for such things we turn prayer into something it was never intended to be. Does it make sense that after just warning us not to lay up treasures on earth because they lead away from God, He would tell us to ask for them? After telling us to replace seeking food and drink with God's kingdom and righteousness, is He promising to give us what He warned against?

Hence **what** we ask for, and **how** we ask for it are both integral to our **receiving**. If we have not received, it is never God's promise. It is always what we are asking for or how we are asking for it.

Seek & Knock

These terms are more indirect. Perhaps there are things we need, but we are still searching the Scriptures seeking to find out what they are. It begins with our struggle to find God. Knocking on each and every door seeking to find the right way. This is a wonderful promise. God is searching throughout the earth for those who are seeking Him so He can help them find Him: “*so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us.*” Acts 17:27

The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it? 10 I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, Even to give every man according to his ways, According to the fruit of his doings. Jer 17:9-10

The LORD is in His holy temple, The LORD'S throne is in heaven; His eyes behold, His eyelids test the sons of men. 5 The LORD tests the righteous, But the wicked and the one who loves violence His soul hates. Ps 11:4-5

For thus says the Lord God: “Indeed I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out. 12 As a shepherd seeks out his flock on the day he is among his scattered sheep, so will I seek out My sheep and deliver them from all the places where they were scattered on a cloudy and dark day. 13 And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them to their own land; I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, in the valleys and in all the inhabited places of the country.” Ezek 34:11-14

when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you call them to mind among all the nations where the Lord your God drives you, 2 and you return to the Lord your God and obey His voice, according to all that I command you today, you and your children, with all

your heart and with all your soul, 3 that the Lord your God will bring you back from captivity, and have compassion on you, and gather you again from all the nations where the Lord your God has scattered you. 4 If any of you are driven out to the farthest parts under heaven, from there the Lord your God will gather you, and from there He will bring you. 5 Then the Lord your God will bring you to the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it. He will prosper you and multiply you more than your fathers. 6 And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live. Deut 30:1-6

No matter where we are, and no matter who we are, God is testing, searching, trying and seeking for those who would serve Him if they could. We see this clearly with the conversions of the Ethiopian eunuch, Paul, and Cornelius(Acts 8-10) who all found what they were seeking because *“the Lord knows those who are his”* (2Tim 2:19), even when we don’t. He promised that even if we are in the remotest parts of heaven, can not only can He find us, but He can bring us back! All He asked of us is that we seek Him.

But obedience to the gospel is only the beginning. If we are “pressing on toward the goal,” seeking truth, purity and holiness, even *“if in anything you are otherwise minded, this also shall God reveal unto you.”*

I press on toward the goal unto the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. 15 Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, be thus minded: and if in anything you are otherwise minded, this also shall God reveal unto you: 16 only, whereunto we have attained, by that same (rule) let us walk. 17 Brethren, be imitators together of me, and mark them that so walk even as ye have us for an example. Phil 3:14-17

Jesus promised if we are truly His disciples and seek to abide in His word we will know the truth and the truth will make us free.

Jesus therefore said to those Jews that had believed him, If ye abide in my word, (then) are ye truly my disciples; 32 and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. John 8:31-32

Those who seek first His kingdom and righteousness will certainly find it. Those who are knocking on the doors of the truth seeking enlightenment will surely find it. Those outside the kingdom actively seeking as the man for a goodly pearl, or passively like finding a treasure in the field will be rewarded.

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. 45 “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, 46 who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it. Mt 13:44-46

Whenever we lack wisdom we need only ask(James 1:5).

When we are tempted, we must seek the way of escape(1 Cor 10:13).

God has promised to reward all who diligently seek Him(Heb 11:6).

Too often we do not have because we never asked(James 4:2).

God is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we can ask(Eph 3:20-21).

We must never forget the fulness of this promise. Everything God has asked us to do He also promised to help us do it. Everything we have trouble doing, He promised to show us how. Everything we do not understand, God promised to reveal(Phil 3:15-16). All of the things Jesus revealed in this sermon are part of image and likeness of God. We will understand most of them naturally and have no difficulty following them. For example, those with a sweet disposition find it easy to understand and follow Jesus’ command to love their enemies, turn the other cheek, and not be angry. Yet other disciples will have grave difficulties not only doing these things , but even in understanding the fulness of what the command is demanding. This is where this promise comes into play. When we find commands we do not understand, or find grave difficulty in fulfilling, we come to God for help. We ask, seek and knock. When we find it difficult to understand why such great sacrifices have to be made for Him, we need to learn that the first thing to do is ask so it can be given, seek so we can find, and knock so it can be opened to us.

When we are looking at the narrow and winding path that leads to life, and are unsure which direction to turn, once again we must ask, seek and knock. When a fellow sheep starts looking like a ravenous wolf, we should ask, seek, and knock. When people call Jesus Lord, but it appears that they are not really doing the will of the Father, we should ask, seek, and knock.

This Promise is for All!

“For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it shall be opened. 7:8

This statement is a comforting breath of fresh air to everyone who believes it. **Everyone** who asks receives! No matter what the obstacle, God promised to help those who love Him with it. This promise places every obligation within reach. Though the nature of discipleship is intense, and Jesus is

uncompromising in His expectations of their fulfillment, God will help.

Jesus wanted us to truly know God's love for us. The feelings parents have toward children started are "*in His image and after his likeness.*" God is a loving Father (Rom 5:6-11) and a faithful Creator (1Pet 4:19). He will never fail or forsake us (Heb 13:5).

Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? 10 Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? 11 If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him! 10-11

God wants all men to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth (I Tim 2:3-4).

He wants us to be more than conquerors (Rom 8:37).

He has given us all things for life and godliness (II Pet 1:3).

If we lack wisdom we can ask Him (James 1:5), and He will give it generously.

He makes all things will together for good (Rom 8:28).

This is what Jesus is promising. God is faithful. He who asks these things of us will always provide the means to do it. We only have to have enough zeal and interest to ask, seek, and knock. Nothing God asks is impossible (Mt 19:26). He will always help us gain them.

The Royal Law

All things therefore whatsoever you would that men should do unto you, even so do you also unto them: for this is the law and the prophets. Mt 7:7-12

How far back does this "*therefore*" go? How does how we treat others tie back to what Jesus has just finished saying? Why does Jesus use a word "*indicating that something follows from another necessarily.*" In exhortations such as this one "*to show what ought now to be done by reason of what has been said.*"

"*oun...* a conj. indicating that something follows from another necessarily; ... Hence it is used in drawing a conclusion and in connecting sentences together logically, *then, therefore, accordingly, consequently, these things being so...* a. in exhortations to show what ought now to be done by reason of what has been (said), i. q. *wherefore,...*" (Thayer, p. 463-464; 3767)

Although it's primary application is the previous thought, there is no reason not to take it back to the first verse of this chapter. Since God gives good things to those who ask him, **therefore** we should do to others as we want others to do to us. Since none of us would respond to any need by one of our own children by doing something evil to them, **therefore** we should do to others as we want to be treated. If we do not want to be guilty in our judging others **therefore** we should judge them as we ourselves want to be judged.

All that we know of fairness, justice, love and mercy that we would like to have done to us, we must do to others. With an imperative, Jesus made this a command and then revealed "*for this is the law and the prophets.*" This mirrors Jesus words about the two greatest commandments.

Jesus said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." 38 This is the first and great commandment. 39 And the second is like it: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." 40 On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets." Mt. 22:37-40

Just as the entire law and prophets suspend or hang on two basic laws of love, so is "*all things therefore whatsoever you would that men should do unto you, even so do you also unto them*" is the Law and the Prophets.

If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you do well; James 2:8-9

8 Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. ... 10 Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law. Rom 13:8, 10

14 For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Gal 5:14

When we train our minds and hearts to always consider first how we would like to be treated if we were on the receiving end and then do that, we fulfill the righteous requirements of the Law.